

HELEN C. WHITE HALL



Fig. 1. Helen C. White Hall from the air, 1979. This view is of the lake side of the building. Other visible buildings are Radio Hall, Science Hall, the Union theatre wing, and the hydraulic laboratory. [Series 8/2, ns- 351]

Helen C. White Hall, named for a long time and much loved English professor, was built in 1969 to house the undergraduate library and the departments of English, philosophy, the library school, and other associated programs.

The building of Helen C. White is unusual in the history of the University building program, because the site was selected before an occupant. There were several candidates (communications, undergraduate library, and education) for the space at 600 North Park Street in the early 1960s. The space's occupants, the old chemical engineering building and the journalism building, were on their last legs. Both were built in 1888, poorly maintained and regarded as fire hazards, and in fact a serious fire in 1965 gutted parts of journalism. The regents discussed the 600 North Park project at their April 1964 meeting, with president Harrington referring to the needs of the communication departments in stating that a substantial building with considerable classroom and office space should be provided there.¹

A June 1965 study refers to investigations into siting the library school, the undergraduate library, the education department and the communication departments. It concludes that because of its proximity to Memorial Library, and the central campus, the North Park Street site should be used for the undergraduate library and the library School. It also recommends that some other departments might be included in the new building. By October these questions were resolved when the regents approved the 600 North Park Street as the site for the undergraduate library building, to include the library



Fig. 2. The undergraduate library building under construction 1970. This view is toward the plaza, the office wing is at the left. [Series 9/1, White Hall, x25-2834]

school, a parking facility, and a high rise tower, including a faculty club. Since several building needs were being combined, the total available money was considerable.²

In November 1965 building committees for the several departments were appointed by chancellor Fleming. In December 1965 a building program was completed by the department of planning and construction. This initial plan called for a ten story tower section, large plazas on both the north and south sides, and an elaborate system of pedestrian overpasses from Bascom Hill and Park Street. The overpass would require the demolition of the old heating station (now Radio Hall). In December the state building commission approved a major academic facility at 600 North Park at an estimated cost of \$7.56 million. At their December 1965 meeting the regents authorized the preparation of plans for the undergraduate library building, to include the undergraduate library, library science, a parking facility, an office tower, and a pedestrian overpass. A faculty dining club was added to the plan, to be revisited later.³

In March 1966 the architect Fitzhugh Scott of Milwaukee was appointed to the project. Late in March the first building conference with the architects and campus representatives (usually Louis Kaplan, Aaron Ihde, Arno Lenz, and Gordon Orr) was held. These meetings were held roughly twice a month through 1966. At this time it was still considered likely that a 2 level faculty club to replace the old and undersized University club would be added to the top of the tower section, although the architect expressed reservation about its advisability. In December the faculty club idea was finally dropped, a victim of ambivalence of the University about serving liquor on campus. At the end of 1966 the project was in good shape, and the schedule had slipped only three months.⁴

Then at the February 6, 1967 meeting, the architect presents the first cost estimates. They were more than \$700,000 over the budget. The committee insists that this estimate must be in error. Architect Scott insists that the budget is insufficient. At the next meeting Scott comes armed with the estimate of a professional estimator whose numbers support his own. The University representatives ask for another meeting at which their own experts. That meeting, on March 2, 1967, has more horrors in store for the committee. Not only was Scott's estimate accurate, but to meet budget the plan will have to be gutted of nearly every feature (the lake plaza, stone work, half the parking) that made the design attractive.⁵

The committee at the last March 1967 meeting concluded that "the present plan is unsatisfactory both in cost and quality. The present architect has state that he cannot modify this building to remain within available funds and provide required space." At their April meeting the committee discarded the work of the previous year and started over. They held seven meetings that spring and in June 1967 the architects

presented a new plan that "comes closer to meeting our needs than any other proposal." This new preliminary plan was approved by the regents in September, 1967, with the condition that the state increase their share by \$854,674. The final plans were approved by the regents in June 1968. Total estimated cost was \$8.34 million. The pedestrian overpass idea had been eliminated, and the schedule called for completion in August 1970. A proposed tunnel from the new building to the Union theatre was funded, then later dropped.⁶

Construction contracts were awarded by the regents on December 6, 1968. The general contract went to Orville. E. Madsen and Sons of Minneapolis, for \$4.1 million. Because funding was still uncertain the schedule of costs was not approved until February 1969. The state paid \$6 million, federal HEW programs \$1.1 million, and a self-amortizing parking loan \$600,000. After fairly standard construction delays, including strikes, shortages, and campus upheaval, the building was opened in the summer of 1971.⁷

The building is a 300 by 200 foot structure of reinforced concrete. It's basic 'U' shape, open toward the south, is four stories high, with two levels of parking below the east end, and three extra stories above the west end. The exterior walls are faced with precast concrete panels and face brick. The appearance of the building, in and out, is consistent with the standard set by the humanities building for plainness and lack of ornamentation. In June 1970 the regents named the building for Helen Constance White, who had died in June 1967. White was one of the most honored, renowned and best loved faculty members in the history of the University. She was on the English faculty, from 1936 to 1965 and chairman of English 1955-58, and 1961-65.⁸

The occupants of the building are the undergraduate library, the library school, the departments of English, history of science and philosophy, and the cooperative children's book center. The main function is a very large and convenient study space, which is diffused through the lower three floors of the building. The parking below the building serves the Memorial Union for evening events.

1) *Regent's Minutes*, April 10, 1964.

2) Rough Draft of Statement, June 15, 1965, series 24/9/3 box 6; *Regent's Minutes*, October 24, 1965.

3) Fleming to Ihde, November 2, 1965, Ihde to Fleming, November 9, 1965, Building Program, December 1965, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, December 14, 1965, series 24/9/3 box 6; *Regent's Minutes*, December 10, 1965.

4) Postweiler to Lorenz, March 8, 1966, Building Committee Conferences #1-20, March 24, 1966-December 16, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6; Proposed Building Schedule, November 10, 1966, Fleming to Edsall, December 29, 1966, Ihde to Fleming, December 21, 1966, Early to Fleming and Harrington, December 5, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 9; *Regent's Minutes*, December 9, 1966, including exhibit H.

5) Building Committee Conferences #21-#35, January 18, 1967-June 29, 1967, series 24/9/3 box 9.

6) Building Committee Conferences #26-#30, March 2, 1967-April 6, 1967, series 24/9/3 box 9; Motion March 17, 1967, Sites to Yamamoto, April 10, 1967, series 24/9/3 box 9; *Regent's Minutes*, September 15, 1967, June 14, 1968, September 6, 1968. Lorenz to Building Commission, June 27, 1968, series 24/9/2-1 box 8.

7) *Regent's Minutes*, April 19, 1968, December 6, 1968 exhibit F, February 14, 1969.

8) Plans in plans room of physical plant; Archives biographical file, "Helen C. White"; *Regent's Minutes*, June 12, 1970; *Daily Cardinal*, June 25, 1971; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1971 p. 21. *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 14, 1971.